

Airmen. That was a real fight, but we got it there. Millions of people were able to read about, see and honor the Tuskegee Airmen because of Ron Delums and because of the work we did to make sure that they received a prominent place in the museum here.

Mr. CUMMINGS. So many people here hear the Congressional Black Caucus stand up over and over again and talk about the war and talk about our objections to the war; but one thing they always hear from us over and over again is that we support our troops, that we support our men and women who are out there fighting. But we have come here tonight to say not only do we support our troops, but we also support our veterans with everything we have got. I used to say we support them 100 percent. I change that to 1 million percent.

Ms. LEE. That is right. My final comment is, as I said earlier, I think we need to put our money where our mouth is now and try to fight like we know how to fight to make sure that each and every nickel that they deserve they receive.

Mr. CUMMINGS. So, Mr. Speaker, again as I have said before, there are so many deeds that go unnoticed, and the ones who perform them are often unseen, unnoticed, unappreciated, and unapplauded. Tonight we in the Congressional Black Caucus take a moment to salute those who have given so much so that we might live the lives that we live.

IN MEMORY OF THE HONORABLE CORWIN M. NIXON

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak briefly about a dear friend of mine who passed away earlier this morning. I rise to honor the memory of the Honorable Corwin Nixon, a dear friend, a distinguished constituent, and an accomplished public servant, who passed away this morning in his beloved Ohio at the age of 90.

He was someone I knew all my life, and someone whose devotion to public service was an inspiration to me. He served with honor for 30 years in the Ohio General Assembly, including 14 years as minority leader. Before his election to the State legislature, he served 12 years as a Warren County commissioner.

He was probably the most recognized man in Warren County, and evidence of the great affection for him can be seen throughout southern Ohio. His name is on a Waynesville covered bridge, a Dayton health center, and an aquatic center at Miami University. But most importantly, Mr. Speaker, thousands of people in Warren County remember him fondly and the help he gave them, a family member, a neighbor, or a friend.

Corwin Nixon's life experiences and his extraordinary people skills made

him an effective representative for all the people in Warren County. He grew up on a farm near Red Lion, Ohio, where he continued to live most of his life.

□ 2115

He rose through the ranks to become manager at a Kroger grocery store in Lebanon, Ohio, and in the 1950s became the manager of the Lebanon Raceway, a job that became his passion as he built the raceway into a major regional attraction.

Corwin Nixon was also an active volunteer, locally, Statewide, and nationally. Among his many activities he served on the boards of Bethesda Hospital in Cincinnati and Grandview Hospital in Dayton. He was President of both the U.S. Trotting Association and the International Trotting Association. He was an original member of the American Horse Council. He was inducted into the Ohio Harness Hall of Fame and received the Harness Horseman International Appreciation Award.

He used to say his start in politics "just happened," but it happened because of his remarkable work ethic, his genuine concern for people, and his ability to deliver for his constituents. His trademark in the State legislature was his ability to work effectively on both sides of the aisle to achieve results for all people. He was a true gentleman who respected everyone and treated them with respect.

Despite all of his impressive accomplishments in government and business, Mr. Nixon's greatest legacy is his family. He and his wife Eleanor were married for 45 years before her death. Their two children, Keith and Karen, provided them with three grandchildren, Melissa, Tina, and Keith, Jr. and four great grandchildren, Corwin Nixon, III, Eleanor, Preston, and Austin.

Mr. Speaker, Corwin Nixon was one of Ohio's great public servants, whose accomplishments touched many lives in our area and throughout the State of Ohio. He will be greatly missed.

CALLING FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION FOR HEALTHY FOREST RESTORATION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, today the House asked for conferees to meet with the other Chamber to work out differences on the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, H.R. 1904. This evening, I am pleased to be joined by some of my colleagues on the House side to talk about the importance of this legislation that passed the House of Representatives nearly 6 months ago and, yet, has still not been resolved.

This issue has been debated for literally years. Former Committee on Ag-

riculture Chairman Bob Smith of Oregon attempted to address this issue after the Sierra Grande fire which destroyed hundreds of homes in New Mexico in the year 2000. The other Chamber considered similar measures. Last year, a similar bill was reported out of the Committee on Resources.

This year, I worked with two other distinguished full committee chairmen, the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO) of the Committee on Resources and the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) of the Committee on the Judiciary. We crafted a bipartisan bill that garnered 90 cosponsors. The bill went through three full committee markups before coming to the floor. Our bill takes a truly national approach to a national problem. We passed this bill on May 20 of this year by an overwhelming and bipartisan majority.

I think it is critical to note that we appointed conferees today. We also unanimously accepted a motion from the minority to instruct our conferees to finish work on this bill within 1 week. The fact that the whole House agreed to these instructions shows the urgency of starting these negotiations but, because of a small group in the other Chamber, the essential step of appointing conferees is being delayed. Any further obstruction from the minority party in the other body thwarts the will of not only the 80 members of the other Chamber who voted in favor of their version, but of the entire U.S. House of Representatives.

Since we passed this bill, almost 6 months have elapsed. While H.R. 1904 languished in the other Chamber, 169 days have gone by, over 3.5 million acres have burned, 30 firefighters have died, and 20 civilians have perished as a result of the fury of catastrophic wildfires. The California wildfires of the last 2 weeks provided a stark reminder of the need to act to prevent future disasters. It was only when the California wildfires were dominating the nightly news that the other Chamber saw fit to take up this critical bill, with an 80 to 14 vote on the measure, which seemed to indicate a sense of urgency on the part of the other Chamber.

Unfortunately, the minority party of the other Chamber is still not allowing the naming of conferees. They are refusing to do so in spite of the fact that they know the differences between the two bills are not insurmountable. They are refusing to do so in spite of the fact that an agreement that could result in real action to improve forest health is easily within reach.

The goals of the two bills are strikingly similar. Both seek to address the issues that have tied the hands of our forest managers: NEPA analysis that drags on for months, administrative appeals that spring up at the last minute, and court actions that stall proposed projects for so long that they are moot long before the judicial process concludes.

Now, I do not want to downplay the fact that there are differences. Their version of the bill added over 100 pages of text and five whole new titles that were not in our version. While there is obviously a good deal of work to be done, we owe it to the people who have fought these fires and the neighbors of our Federal forests who have been threatened, evacuated, or left homeless, to finish the job and produce a bill that the President can sign.

All of these issues can be resolved. The only thing preventing us from beginning this resolution is the refusal by the minority in the other Chamber to allow the appointment of their conferees. This action negates the legislative process which calls for a bicameral conference committee to work out any differences between two versions of the same bill, and it is the only thing preventing us from taking steps to protect our communities, our forests, and our watersheds from catastrophic wildfires.

It is important to remember that the House bill received widespread support when it came to this floor. The Society of American Foresters praised it for giving new tools to forest managers to protect our forests. The National Volunteer Fire Council praised it for reducing the threat faced by their members when they are on the fire line. Many of the same groups, as well as the International Association of Fire Chiefs, have asked us to go to conference to address specific issues and finalize a bill. That is my strong desire as well as the desire of the vast majority of those in this House.

There are over 190 million acres of forests and rangelands which remain at risk of catastrophic wildfire, insect, and disease, a landmass larger than New England. Our bill takes the modest step of addressing the hazardous conditions on only 20 million acres of this total. At the same time, it takes an innovative approach to forest health on private forestlands, creating new programs to detect and suppress such forest pests as the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, the Emerald Ash Borer, and the Gypsy Moth. In short, it takes a national approach to a national problem.

It is time to put partisan politics aside, so that we can bring forth a bill before the end of the session which can prevent future catastrophic forest fires and to begin improving the health of our Nation's forests. It would compound the tragedy still unfolding in California if last week's vote in the other Chamber was just for show. A tiny minority should not be allowed to continue the dilatory tactics that have caused this bill to languish until the end of the session. Time is short. The fires are smoldering in California, and the conditions that created these infernos will only get worse unless Congress acts now.

I would now like to recognize several of my colleagues who have supported our bill as it moved quickly through the House and whose districts badly

need the attention H.R. 1904 would provide. First, someone who understands this problem exceedingly well, because the State of Colorado has experienced some very difficult problems with forest fires this year and in previous years, particularly last year. I recall the devastation to the water supply for the City of Denver, something that is of great concern to us that our bill addresses, but that some would like to delete from it because they only want to allow work being done in what are called "beauty strips" around urban areas, overlooking the fact that the watersheds for many, many communities around the country are protected by our national forests and ruined when those forests go up in flames, and mud and ash and everything else goes down into these important reservoirs and other water supplies.

So at this time I am pleased to yield to the gentlewoman from Colorado (Mrs. MUSGRAVE).

Mrs. MUSGRAVE. Mr. Speaker, the House passed its version of the Healthy Forest Initiative in May of this year with an overwhelming majority and bipartisan support. The other Chamber has had our version of the bill for over 6 months and only passed it after fires in southern California scorched almost 1 million acres, destroyed over 3,400 homes, and killed 20 citizens last week.

During a meeting of the Committee on Agriculture, one of our members expressed to us his sorrow that one of his cousins had been burned to death and her sister was burned over 85 percent of her body. One of our own Members lost his home in this tragic event.

After we took this vote in the House, a simple motion to appoint conferees has been blocked by the minority party, preventing the swift conclusion of negotiations. The forest health conditions across the country are too extreme and the threats to our citizens' lives and property too severe for this to be a political football. In Colorado, a beautiful State with beautiful national forests, 7.5 million acres are at risk to fire, insects, and disease. This is more than two-thirds of our forested acres in my State alone.

The need to provide the modest relief provided by H.R. 1904 can best be illustrated by what the people on the front range went through trying to protect their forest. Working in close cooperation with the local community, conservation groups, and Colorado State University, the Forest Service proposed a modest effort to reduce hazardous fuels in this region. After exhaustive NEPA analysis, radical environmentalists filed an administrative appeal, and then a lawsuit.

As the process unfolded, the Hayman fire destroyed the watershed before the project could be implemented. My colleague, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDO), described this in July, how devastating the Hayman fire was. Mr. Speaker, 138,114 acres were destroyed, and 132 homes were lost in that fire. In total, in the year of 2002,

the damages were 619,000 acres burned, 384 homes destroyed, 624 additional structures demolished and, sadly, nine firefighters were killed in this fire. The damage from the fires closed 26 water treatment facilities. After two smaller fires, the Denver Water Board had to spend over \$20 million cleaning up the reservoir.

The crises in our forests warrant action. It is imperative that conferees be appointed. Partisan politics must be put aside, and Congress must act to protect our national treasures.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair would remind all Members to avoid improper references to the Senate, including criticizing Senate action or inaction.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman. Her observations are very true. One of the areas that we overlook not only are the water pollution problems that occur, but also air pollution. The fires in California have emitted so many toxic fumes and other forms of air pollution that some are saying that more emissions have occurred from just those fires in California in the last few weeks than occur from all of the automobiles, all of the trucks, and all of the buses emitting all year long in the country. And we saw so many evidences of it. I have a sister who lives in southern California and experienced the difficulty with breathing and so on. Literally millions of people were exposed to this enormous problem. It is not simply a natural wildfire that burns along the ground and the large trees are preserved and so on; these fires consume everything in their path: large trees, small trees, homes, businesses, automobiles, and even some people's lives. And, in doing so, the devastation is truly enormous. Yet, we ignore it as we continue to neglect our forests and not give the professional forest managers the ability to manage those forests.

At this time, it is my pleasure to yield to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES), a member of the Committee on Agriculture and chairman of the Subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture who knows something about this from problems in North Carolina.

□ 2130

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) very much for yielding, and I thank him for his leadership in putting together a comprehensive effort to respond to the tragedies that have faced us in recent days. And thank goodness for rain. It certainly was not sound management practices that have given our valiant firefighters the breath that they needed, the time to rest, and to hopefully bring these fires under control.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the healthy forest initiative, which was passed by the House

in May with an overwhelming bipartisan majority and was finally passed last week by the other Chamber. It is sad that it takes utter devastation, destroyed homes, and loss of life before legislation can finally be passed that will correct Federal policies that desperately were needed to be changed years ago.

But now that we are in the home stretch and the House is eager to move the conference on this legislation, a simple motion to appoint conferees again is being blocked, as was mentioned earlier. The House appointed conferees today. And I want to commend the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman GOODLATTE) and the gentleman from California (Chairman POMBO) for their efforts and leadership in trying to move this bill to conference as quickly and as constructively as possible.

This legislation is important in a number of States, particularly my home State of North Carolina. The Healthy Forest Restoration Act not only provides our Federal land managers with greater flexibility to deal with fire dangers in the West but new authority to test innovative detection and suppression techniques for the many pests that threaten the Eastern forests.

The Southern pine beetle is the most significant threat to forest health in North Carolina. Normally Southern pine beetles attack and kill stress-weakened trees. When populations reach epidemic proportions, even healthy trees can be attacked and overwhelmed.

In North Carolina, the beetles are affecting over 1.5 million acres of pine. Timber valued at more than \$12.4 million was destroyed last year alone by the pine beetle. Our hardwood forests are also threatened by invasive pests such as the gypsy moth. Gypsy moth eradication is a high priority because of the damage it can do to trees in residential areas as well as scenic mountain areas.

There are almost 17 million acres of private timberland in North Carolina, representing billions of dollars in investments by private landowners and the forest industry. The threats to these forests threaten the economy of my State and the ecological value of these lands. No individual landowner is equipped to deal with the pest outbreaks on the scale that we have seen in recent years.

At this time, I would like to ask the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE), the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, if he would yield for a question.

Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding from recent meetings that we have held that the minority leader in the other body has made a provision and added to another bill basically a healthy forest initiative for the State of South Dakota. However, we here are unable to move forward with conferees at this point in order to give the same

type of attention, protection, and also commonsense land management practices to our other States. Is this the gentleman's understanding?

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) is correct. It is regrettable but nonetheless true, that legislation was passed a couple of years ago that included a provision placed into an appropriations bill that creates a different standard for South Dakota.

I am quite glad that the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota has that different standard, because they have the ability to allow the Forest Service employees, the district rangers, and others in that national forest to prepare the land in environmentally sensitive ways, to protect that forest from the kind of catastrophic wildfires that we have seen in California and Oregon and Arizona and New Mexico and Colorado and Idaho and Montana and other States as well.

But there is absolutely no reason why the provisions in either the bill passed by the House or the bill passed by the other body, neither of which contain the same level of authority granted to the Forest Service folks in South Dakota, could not be made available to the other 49 States as well. We are not even asking for as much as what South Dakota has right now. And, yet, we are being impeded from being able to bring this issue to a resolution.

We are so very close; the differences between the House and Senate can be worked out. There are differences. We should not minimize them. They are important differences. But we passed today here on the floor of this House a motion to instruct conferees offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the ranking democrat on the Committee on Agriculture, a motion to instruct that says we will have an open conference with participation by all of the conferees appointed. And, by the way, the Speaker went ahead today and appointed those conferees. We are ready to act. We have committed to an open process. We have committed to a speedy process.

The motion to instruct calls for reporting back a bill to the House by next Thursday. And that is possible if we would be able to go to conference. But if action is not taken promptly, we will lose that timetable. Time will slip away from us. And, of course, we are nearing the end of this Congress. And if time slips too much, we may be unable to complete this legislation, which President Bush very anxiously wants to sign, supported by so many bipartisan Members of both the House and the other body.

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's not only keen perspective on the issue but his accurate knowledge of the history. And I would ask that if he would yield for one more question, I would like to pursue this issue a little further in South Dakota.

My question is this: the gentleman mentioned the Black Hills National Forest, which is a true national treasure. And I agree with him wholeheartedly that I am very glad that this wonderful treasure has this degree of protection. I seem to recall, particularly since my daughter-in-law is a native of South Dakota, and a wonderful member of my staff is also a South Dakotan, and I have enjoyed many trips there, but were there not some catastrophic fires there as well not too long ago?

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) is correct. There have been catastrophic fires in South Dakota, but there was even more importantly a recognition that there were vast areas, not just the so-called beauty strips immediately around communities, but vast areas of the Black Hills National Forest that were at risk of catastrophic wildfire.

We are not talking about the wildfire that burns along the ground and gets rid of the brush and things out of the area and leaves the larger trees; but we are talking about fires that, because of the buildup of fuel density, the trees continuing to grow, the fires being suppressed over a long period of time, when they finally do occur, they stair-step up from the brush into the smaller trees, into the larger trees, into the overstory of all of the trees in an area and devastate the whole area.

Then when it comes up to a community, no small narrow band of treated area will keep that kind of massive fire that can sometimes leap over long distances because of the enormous height that the flames reach and the burning pieces. In the California fire, there was a report last week of an instance in which a 4 by 8 piece of plywood was spotted by one of the planes combating the fire flying through the air in flames at 2,800 feet of altitude. Now, when these things can reach that kind of proportion, a small strip around a community will not protect the community. So wisely, the legislation that protects South Dakota does not include that type of restriction.

The Forest Service there can use their judgment with proper notice to the public and with fair hearing for people who have, as we all do, a concern that these things be done properly, the ability to treat various parts of the forest not simply limit it to those areas. That is one of the things that is apparently holding up our progress here. I think it is a serious mistake.

Mr. Speaker, we should be allowed to go in and work with the other body to fashion legislation that will address this problem in the other 49 States.

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Speaker, again I thank the gentleman for his precise and concise information. As a matter of instruction for this body, the conditions you describe almost duplicate the conditions in a thunderstorm. The fire starts low, as you said; and as the heat

builds, it creates a tremendous upswelling of current, which, again, has the same destructive effect as a thunderstorm which results in hail and tornadoes. But as the gentleman very clearly illustrated, those pieces of burning limbs, lumber, whatever the case may be, can spread this fire in an incredibly rapid manner.

And my point in all this being that the same reasons that South Dakota saw fit to pass local legislation are the reasons that we have in this fine legislation that we are talking about tonight.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I would like to make one more point. I have heard the terms partisan, bipartisan. This is about as bipartisan as anything could possibly be. Both parties are working very hard, way beyond, for the most part, to reach commonsense solutions to tragic, dangerous, destructive, and expensive fires.

I would say to my friend, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE), that to me an observation is that this is not partisan in any way. And I use as an example, I was in the chair this afternoon, and the discussion was about how we develop more plentiful, less expensive sources of energy to keep our manufacturers, keep our transportation, to create jobs and to grow our economy. And, again, it was a bipartisan effort. Republicans and Democrats joined together in a commonsense manner to reach agreement and to come up with policy and solutions that are good for all America.

So what I saw there were Republicans and Democrats hand in hand working together against the extremists who inhabit a very small portion of the population, but have an unusual amount of sway in these discussions.

So I would simply submit for this discussion that this is not about disagreements between parties; this is about commonsense men and women of good faith on both sides, Republican and Democrats, who are uniting against a radical extreme, far way-out small segment of the community that is costing lives and costing money.

So that is my point, Madam Speaker. This is not a partisan issue. And I think it is important that we take it further and define it as it really is. It is common sense versus nonsense.

So, in closing, again, I thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE), Madam Speaker, for the time and attention. The Healthy Forest Restoration Act provides the flexibility and resources necessary to deal with these problems, protects millions of acres, thousands of homes, and citizens. I hope the two Chambers can resolve their differences and send the bill to the President as quickly as possible. Common sense, not nonsense.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Madam Speaker, I hope that what was done by this Congress for the State of South Dakota 2 years ago will be done for the other 49 States as well. In fact, we do not even ask quite as much. We simply ask for

fair treatment, and we hope that we will get it soon. It is very, very important.

Madam Speaker, I think it is interesting to note that of the speakers we have had down here tonight, the furthest west is the gentlewoman from Colorado. And I think this reflects that this is not simply a Western problem; this is a problem that affects the whole country. Because in the East while we have different types of forests, they also suffer forest fires; but the greatest threat in the eastern forests are the insects, and the disease, many of which are nonnative species that have come into this country from one source or another around the world. And we do not have the natural enemies of these species to combat in our forests. So often times they run rampant: the pine bark beetle that the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) mentioned, the wooly adelgid which attacks our hemlocks, the gypsy moth which attacks our hardwoods, and the emerald ash borer which attacks our ash trees.

Madam Speaker, at this time I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BURNS).

□ 2145

Mr. BURNS. Madam Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman yielding me this time.

Madam Speaker, it is time for us to take action. This body has done its job. The Committee on Agriculture that the chairman does such a wonderful job in managing brought this bill to the floor. As my colleagues have pointed out, it was passed overwhelmingly from both sides of the aisle, and there was not a dissension that we could not resolve. So as we worked with the Committee on Resources and worked with the Committee on Agriculture, we came here and passed this measure in May. We had high hopes for swift action in the other body. We were happy finally to see that action recently.

Unfortunately, it was only after the tragic situations in the West and in California where so much air and water quality was damaged, and certainly the loss of life and homes, the threats that were there, we were certainly glad to see action; but now we face a challenge. The challenge is moving from the two bodies to the conference committee, and we have worked very vehemently to ensure that happens.

When this measure came to the committee, I consulted the Warnell School of Forestry at the University of Georgia and asked them to review the legislation and give me their input, and tell me what they thought was best for not only Georgia's forest, but our Nation's forests. They did a very thorough job in their advice and counsel, and I took it.

We have the Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia. It is a place I enjoy. I enjoy the fishing and the trout streams and the air and the quality of life there. We have to protect it. H.R. 1904, the Healthy Forest Initiative, is

legislation that will not only protect the Chattahoochee National Forest, but forests from North Carolina to California, from the Dakotas to Texas, and it is important that we move this legislation.

Certainly the biggest challenge that we face is not allowing our forests to become the political football of the current session of Congress. They are too important. We have over 17 million acres of private forest land in Georgia alone. As the chairman accurately pointed out, fires are a concern for us, but they are not the dramatic concern that we see in the West like in California and Colorado. Our real challenge is pests, as the gentleman from North Carolina has pointed out.

Mr. HAYES. Madam Speaker, I cannot help but be touched by the irony of what the gentleman is saying. The gentleman from Georgia is a very valued member of the Committee on Agriculture, and I have been here slightly longer than he has, so when the gentleman came, I had an opportunity to give him an assignment. I think he remembers the assignment.

Madam Speaker, Georgia is known for many, many things, but the one that we particularly enjoy is the bobwhite quail. Prime forest management for the bobwhite quail requires controlled burning. It requires removing fuel which prevents forest fires, but when done in a controlled way, in the spring of the year, under proper humidity conditions, typically at night to reduce smoke and other emissions, not only is habitat produced, but food sources for nongame species, cover for songbirds, all types of animals and birds, is created. Again, a commonsense, tried-and-true practice, accepted for well over 100 years of land management, here is a way that we actively control fuel, manage our forests, stop disease, create habitat, and increase filtration ability for watersheds and streams.

Madam Speaker, I ask the gentleman how is that project coming?

Mr. BURNS. Madam Speaker, I would tell the gentleman that the challenge is still there. When I was growing up, there was an abundance of small game, especially small bobwhite quail and squirrels and rabbits, just natural wildlife. My colleague is correct, back in that era it was a common practice to burn the woods. We would take the underbrush out. We would create the habitat as the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) suggests, and that would provide a plentiful environment for native species and migratory birds.

As we face the challenges today, we see fewer and fewer of our natural habitats available for our wildlife. I think this is a bill that promotes wildlife. It promotes best practices in our forestry. I think the biggest concern I have is we do not need to be playing politics with the forests of our Nations.

We have fires in Georgia. Mercifully, they are fairly small, but yet we lost

over 84,000 acres of forestland to fire in the last 4 years. But as has been pointed out, we have had a 278 percent increase in the southern pine beetle, and that can be directly attributed to the fact that we are not managing our forests with the best practices.

This restoration act provides our Federal land managers with the flexibility that they need not only to deal with forest fires and fire dangers, but also to deal with disease and pests that are invading all of our forests. We have to suppress the pests and make sure that they do not continue to threaten our eastern forests. Billions of dollars to Georgia's economy are attributable to our forestry industry. There are 17 million acres that need protection. If we look at our neighboring States of Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, we all face similar challenges as we try to deal with the need to have healthy, vibrant forests.

It amazes me that we cannot come to some reasonable accommodation in a very expeditious amount of time. I would hope that as this body has already done, as it has worked together, and as the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) has pointed out, this has been a very strong bipartisan bill. We have worked hand in hand with both sides of the aisle to reach a conclusion and agreement that we can move to the other body. They took that up, they passed it by a substantial margin, even an overwhelming margin, and now it is time for the next step. The next step has to be for us to move forward and bring this bill to a conference and out of conference and back to the floor of the House.

The Healthy Forest Restoration Act is indeed a national solution to a national problem. The time for action is now. I concur with my colleagues from Virginia and North Carolina. We need a commonsense solution, and we have it in our midst. We need to move it through both bodies and pass it and send it to the President.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BURNS) for his comments.

Now, somebody who has experienced this problem firsthand in the State of New Mexico has joined us. I yield to the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE). New Mexico last year suffered some devastating fires which we thought would be just the thing that would cause Congress to get over the top and get this issue resolved. Unfortunately, we fell short; but we are back again this year, and we are as close as we have ever been to getting this legislation through both bodies so we can send it to the President.

Mr. PEARCE. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for talking about this critical issue in front of this body.

I grew up in New Mexico and on our vacations we would drive to Cloudcroft, New Mexico. From the early 1950s, I noticed that there was a place there of thousands of acres where no tree grew. It was in the middle of pine forests in

southern New Mexico, and it was always odd to me. It was only after beginning to work in the legislature and learning what makes a forest grow and not grow that I realized that was a forest fire that had occurred in the middle part of the century, and over 50 years later, the soil was still sterile from the effects of that fire.

So when my constituents ask me what is a healthy forest, I tell them one that is natural, one that grows up the way that conditions would permit. In New Mexico, a healthy forest, generally, historically, pictures tell us, had about 25 to 50 trees per acre. I like to ask schoolchildren when I go around, how many trees per acre are in New Mexico forests now? On average, we have over 1,500 trees per acre. The trees do not get the nutrients that they need, they do not get the water they need. In attempting to get the sunlight they need, the small-diameter trees grow to 50, 75 and 100 feet, matching the height of the mature trees. Then, as has been described, as a fire starts, it uses the small diameter as kindling to get the fire burning across the top of the entire forest, the crown fires burning just the top of the trees, burning just the piece that will kill it, and then the healthy, good hardwood stands rotting, waiting to just become a part of the soil, sometimes waiting years to decay.

Another problem with an unhealthy forest is that they soak up water, and in New Mexico which is an arid State which desperately needs water, and we are in the fifth year of a drought, if each tree consumes only one gallon per day, the estimates are in New Mexico, we have over a billion too many trees, that is 1 billion gallons a day. The actual estimates are much higher, Madam Speaker, and that trees will probably use 100 gallons a day. And in an arid State where water is life, where water is growth, where water is our future, we are mismanaging our forests into unhealthy situations that are going to burn and destroy this national treasure and this natural resource, that rob our cities of the water they need for growth and for the population, all because extremists in this society say we would rather watch them burn than to cut one single tree.

There are extremists in this city who say no State, except South Dakota, will be allowed to cut trees without the NEPA studies that are required, no state but South Dakota, a provision that was snuck in in the middle of the night over 3 years ago in an omnibus bill. The rest of the States want the same permission to do commonsense thinning to create a healthy forest. It is not a question of if our forests are going to burn, Madam Speaker, it is a question of when our forests are going to burn.

I flew this year between two towns in western New Mexico, and I flew over 200,000 acres with just the stubs of smoldering trees standing. The entire 200,000 acres was killed in just a short

period of time. The unreasonable, extreme environmentalists who will block every attempt to do commonsense thinning which will create our healthy forests should be ashamed. And those special interest people who in this city who will give one State permission to do the commonsense practices of good forest management should unlock the doors and allow the rest of us to have access to the same commonsense approach to managing our forests, to managing our forests to become healthy forests instead of the death traps they are now.

Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) for some very commonsense observations. Just looking across the spectrum of Members who have spoken here tonight and who spoke here today on the motion to instruct conferees, we had Members from Oregon, California, Colorado, Montana, Idaho, New Mexico, Arizona, all across the West they experience this problem; and then Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, they experience this problem. And folks from Michigan and Pennsylvania have spoken about forestlands. We are blessed in this country with great and bountiful forests all across America, but we need to take care of them. And when we have to manage them because people live in and around them and we have to fight forest fires, that fuel density builds up. When it does, we have to give our forest managers, the professional people, the ability to step in and do what needs to be done.

□ 2200

We are doing it in such a way that we expedite the process so that it does not go for so long that the problem overtakes the solution, but at the same time we do it in such a way that the ability of concerned citizens to have their input in the process, to even appeal the decisions that they think are inappropriate, to have that opportunity to do that but do it in a way that is expedited because that is what is needed for a problem as serious as this one.

I see that we are now joined by another Member of Congress who has experienced this problem firsthand in his State of Montana. I would be pleased to yield to the gentleman from Montana for him to also give his observations about the problem with the state of forests in his State and around the country.

Mr. REHBERG. I thank the gentleman from Virginia for taking on an issue that we find very important in the State of Montana and throughout the Nation and, that is, healthy forests. I have been involved in the issue since 1988. We saw the fires exist in our State to the tune of almost 1 million acres. As an observer, I assumed our elected officials would do something about that. Over the course of the next

few years, I watched nothing happen. Our forests continued to deteriorate. In the year 2000 in the State of Montana, we saw almost 1 million acres burn again, and I assumed something would be done. Again, nothing was done. When I joined the Congress, I was impressed by the fact that our chairman now of the Committee on Resources and my chairman of the Committee on Agriculture were willing to hold hearings to try and find the solution to healthy forests. It does not take rocket scientists to figure out what is wrong.

I manage resources. I am in the agriculture business in Montana. I clearly understand a mineral cycle, a water cycle. I understand that when you have undergrazed grass, it kills grass as much as overgrazed grass. I notice that when you have timber, when you have underthinned timber, it creates the same devastation as clear cutting.

But there are those within our Federal Government and there are those within this Congress that do not understand that. When I see various Members of the body from the other side of the Capitol making exceptions for their State, understanding that you need a management plan to thin their timber to create a healthier environment and they do not want to provide that same opportunity for us, there is something hypocritical. Shame on them. It is time that this Congress understands that healthy forests are created. But I understand that there are only a certain level of tools that can be used to manage our forests.

What are those tools? Prescribed burn can be a tool. Uncontrolled fire is a catastrophe. It is stupid. But prescribed burn is a tool. Grazing, which is something I know something about because I have grazing animals on my operation to thin the undergrazed properties, creates a healthy environment. So what do we do? Move some livestock in and graze and take care of that undergrazed property.

Logging. Why do we find that timber companies are bad things? On forest properties, on Federal properties, we tell them what to cut, when to cut, how to cut and we ask them to use their capital, their labor and their equipment. How can that be a problem? Unless, of course, we do not do it right. We have some of the best environmental laws in this country. Let us use those logging companies as a tool to manage our forests. But we cannot get beyond the politics of creating some kind of an argument that we do not want logging companies in our forests. Let us use them as a tool. Let us talk about holistic management of our forests. Let us move beyond the politics.

I think that we have a plan that we have sent to the Senate; we have asked them to consider an opportunity, we have asked them to consider a holistic approach to management. What do we hear? "We have a perfect plan. We want the House to accept it without any debate." How arrogant. I have only been here for 3 years, I say to the chairman

of my Committee on Agriculture. I have only been here for 3 years, but the arrogance of the attitude that we have got the perfect piece of legislation being sent from the Senate is incredible. I do not understand that kind of a concept.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). The Chair would remind all Members to avoid improper references to the Senate, including criticizing Senate action or inaction.

Mr. REHBERG. The arrogance of somebody who makes a determination that we do not have a dog in this fight, that we do not have an opinion, that we do not understand the holistic management of our forests is incredible to me. I think the taxpayer ought to be appalled. I think the Nation ought to be appalled. And I think it is time that we make a determination to do what the gentleman from Virginia has done in the Committee on Agriculture with all the hearings that I sat through as a freshman on his subcommittee and that our chairman of the Interior and now Resources Committee has done to consider the whole healthy forests initiative. I think we ought to take the high road; we ought to take the approach that we have sent over to them and say, it is not entirely about safe communities, which safe communities are important, but it is about healthy forests. And we sent over a healthy forests policy.

And so what we really need to do is we need to sit down in the conference committee, work out the differences, pass something along to the President, and do what the gentleman initially suggested a number of years ago and, that is, create truly a healthy forest policy. I thank the gentleman for what he has done in his committee.

Mr. GOODLATTE. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman's point is very well taken. A healthy forest means safe communities. That is what we are really talking about here. If we get to the root cause of this problem, which is our unhealthy forests, we will not see the kind of disasters that we have seen in recent years that have taken lives, taken homes, taken families away from their communities. It has been a disaster of the highest order. While these disasters have taken place, the Congress has watched the burning and has been inactive.

The gentleman is correct. In the subcommittee that I used to chair, we held many, many hearings. In the full committee that I chair now, we are holding those hearings. We moved forward with legislation. We worked closely with the Committee on Resources and the Committee on the Judiciary. We passed a bipartisan bill. Forty-one Democrats in the House joined with the overwhelming majority of Republicans to pass this bill. The ranking member of the Committee on Agriculture has been a real pleasure to work with on this issue, even though he has acknowledged today in his district in Texas

there is so little forestland. But he recognizes this problem in other parts of Texas and in other parts of the country. We have worked together to move this far. Why we cannot see the same response from other quarters where we need to have cooperation to get this done and to move the final bill to the President, I do not know. But nonetheless, we stand here and wait for the opportunity to finish what we have started.

Mr. REHBERG. Mr. Speaker, if I might ask the gentleman from Virginia a question. What possible reason would others within the United States Congress want to create an exception for their own forests or their own State and not provide the same opportunity for Virginia, Washington, Idaho, Colorado, now California, and certainly Montana?

Mr. GOODLATTE. We mentioned this earlier. It is indeed disappointing that the opportunity would exist for anyone to jump the gun, if you will, to get an opportunity to do the right thing, and we are glad that the State of South Dakota has the tools that they need to protect the Black Hills National Forest, a precious resource. Why we would not also have the opportunity to do that in the 49 other States where all of the States in one way or another have problems with protecting forests, why we would not get that, I do not know. But we stand here and we wait for the opportunity.

Mr. REHBERG. Another question, Mr. Speaker, if I might of the gentleman from Virginia. Is there any reason why this has not happened in the past based upon the majorities of the Congress and the fact that within the last year and a half this is the first time in 40 years we have had an opportunity to effect change? Would we not now try a different management approach? Not to say we are entirely blameless, because certainly we supported Smokey Bear, we believed that putting fires out, we believed that the management plan that existed in the past perhaps had some credibility. But recognizing that it has failed, would it not be incumbent upon us now in our new majority position to come up with a new and more exciting, more vibrant opportunity to see not only a healthier wildlife and a healthier environment but certainly a safer environment for our forests?

Mr. GOODLATTE. The gentleman is absolutely right. There is absolutely no question that we have to fight forest fires. We do not want to send the message that when people go into our national forests or when natural lightning strikes occur that we should not be getting those firefighters out there. That is a part of saving the forests from disastrous wildfires, not the natural fires that burn along the ground, but the kind that stair-steps up and consumes the entire forest.

We also know that it is important to do that, to keep the communities and people who live around those forests

safe. But we also know that when you do that, when you intervene like that, you also have to take the responsibility to keep the forests healthy in other ways, to use prescribed burns where it is appropriate to do so. These have minimal consequences when they are done properly. They accomplish the goal of burning out the brush on the ground. They do not emit the kind of massive amounts of air pollution that these catastrophic, uncontrolled wildfires have. They do not cause the same kind of devastation to our water resources that these kinds of fires we have seen in Colorado and California and Montana and elsewhere have. But we need to give the Forest Service the tools to take the proper steps.

And so I am glad the gentleman has made that observation that this legislation that we have passed through the House with strong bipartisan support and similar legislation that has passed through the other body but has not yet been conferenced, has not yet had the opportunity to resolve the differences, stands waiting for that final resolution. We stand here waiting for the opportunity to conference this.

Mr. REHBERG. Mr. Speaker, if I may in conclusion to the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture just say very quickly that as I travel around the State of Montana and this country, I know and I talk to people about the fact that Federal properties in Montana, which I represent, are owned by the taxpayers. I understand that. And so when I ask them a question, what do you want to see from your forests, they usually tell me, I want to see healthy wildlife. Okay, I can accept that. They say they want to see a healthy environment. We do not get so specific as talking about the mineral cycle and the water cycle, but it is something that I understand. They talk about the fact that they want to see healthy trees. When I explain to them that a dead tree that has got beetles in it and the beetles pass on to another tree, a dead and dying tree creates a dead and dying forest, and unless we remove the cancer of that dead and dying tree, it will kill the forest. They say, that, I can understand.

Then we move on to fire and I say, if you do not control the litter, the excess, the overgrowth and the dying trees, you will create a fire danger and that is not very bright. You know what they do? They usually go, yeah. You know, we did not realize. If you had just told us that we have dead and dying trees, we have wildlife that do not have enough grass, we are creating a canopy that is killing the grass, it is killing the trees, it is creating a safety danger and houses are burning up and people are losing their lives, they usually go, I can understand this issue. What do you suggest?

And then I move into talking about the tools that are available, prescribed burn, grazing, logging, thinning and such. They go, well, we had no idea, because that's not the story we are hear-

ing from our lobbyists and our special interests and our newspapers and television stations in places like Connecticut and Rhode Island and such. And, yeah, we own that land and we want to take care of that land and we thank you for understanding the issue. Thank you for supporting healthy forests.

I thank the gentleman from Virginia for his hard work, his dedication and his effort to create the right kind of bill coming out of this Congress. I just hope that that is what we can pass on to the President of the United States.

Mr. GOODLATTE. I thank the gentleman. I want to thank the Speaker of the House, Speaker HASTERT, for the opportunity to discuss this important issue tonight. I also want to thank my ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), without whom we would not have come so far this year. The other committee chairmen who helped hone the bill also deserve high praise for their efforts. I wish that I were not here on the floor of the House pleading the case to start formal negotiations.

□ 2215

This issue has dragged on needlessly for the entire legislative session. We need to discharge our duty, follow regular order, and conduct open, fair conference processes called for by the House this morning.

THE MIDDLE CLASS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, tonight I want to focus on some very important issues which impact the middle class of our country, and I do that as the only Independent in the U.S. House of Representatives. And as an Independent, the views that I am going to express are somewhat different than the views of many of my colleagues.

The first point that I want to make is in a sense an obvious point to most people in this country, especially perhaps the 50 or 60 percent of the American people who have given up on the political process and no longer vote, and that is that in Washington, D.C., in the White House and in the United States Congress, money, big money plays an enormous role. There is a reason, and I am going to get into this in greater length in a moment, why we are hemorrhaging decent-paying manufacturing jobs and those jobs are going to China where workers there are paid 50 cents an hour and why corporate America is laying off millions of American workers to take jobs abroad. And one of the reasons that we have a disastrous trade policy is the huge amounts of money that come into Congress, that go into the White House, which have opened up access so that these corporations can go a long way toward

destroying decent-paying jobs in America. Money talks. There is a reason why in the United States of America our people pay by far the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs.

I border in Vermont, the State that I represent, Canada, the Canadian Nation. And in Canada people pay in some cases one-fifth, one-third, one-half of the prices that people in the United States pay for the same exact medicine made by the same company. There is a reason for the fact that in the United States we are the only country in the industrialized world that does not in one form or another regulate the drug industry and prevent them from charging Americans any prices they want, and that reason is big money.

The pharmaceutical industry contributes huge amounts of money to Members of Congress. They have lobbyists running all over this place. Several years ago when the President of the United States had a major fund raiser, there was the pharmaceutical industry up there on the dais with him. There is a reason why the United States today is the only Nation in the industrialized world which does not have a national health care program guaranteeing health care to all people, and that reason is money coming into Washington, D.C. from the insurance companies and other people who profit off of a health care system which is disintegrating before our eyes. There is a reason why pollution all over America is rampant, and that has to do with the money that utilities and other large corporations contribute to political parties and to the White House.

Front page, New York Times today: "Lawyers at EPA Say it will Drop Pollution Cases," and the article goes on to point out, of course, that "Representatives of the utility industry have been among President Bush's biggest campaign donors, and a change in the enforcement policies has been a top priority of the industry's lobbyists." In other words, they have now been given permission to pollute because they are major campaign contributors.

There is a reason why this Congress and this President have passed legislation which provides enormous tax breaks for the wealthiest people in our country, hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks that will go to millionaires and billionaires, while at the same time we have the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world for our children, where we have working people living in their cars because they cannot afford the housing that is available to them. That has everything to do with the money that the wealthy and large corporations contribute into the political process.

Mr. Speaker, the corporate media, which, of course, is owned by big money interests, does not talk about what is happening in our country too much in terms of what is going on in the lives of ordinary people, but in my view, in many respects the United